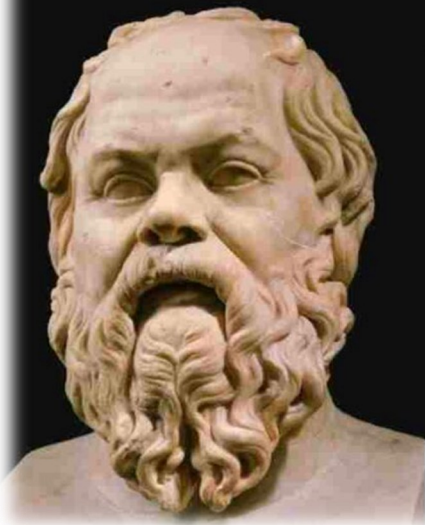


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**“The only true wisdom is
in knowing you know
nothing.”**

— Socrates

SOMETHINKOFVALUE



C. 470 BC <::><::><::> 399 BC

**Compiled by:
Prof Dr S Ramalingam
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C. 470 BC



399 BC



<https://www.tripimprover.com/blog/the-death-of-socrates-by-jacques-louis-david>

Death of Socrates

Socrates is sitting on his deathbed in his cell and is reaching for the glass of hemlock to take his own life. He is convicted to death by a jury in Athens for not believing in the Greek gods and for sharing this view with the young people in Athens. You can see the opened shackles laying on the floor. His disciples are gathered around him and cannot believe what is going to happen. The executioner from the state is holding the glass for Socrates while looking away and covering his eyes.

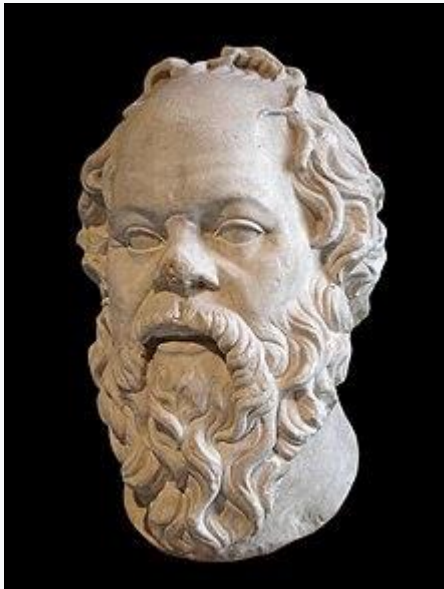
Even in the moment just before his death, the illuminated Socrates is teaching to the people around him with his hand up in the air. Plato is sitting at the end of the

bed with his back towards Socrates and his eyes closed. He seems in his thoughts, but his ear is prominently depicted to indicate that he is listening to Socrates. Plato has documented several dialogues of Socrates as Socrates himself did not leave any written documents. You can see the scroll and the pot with ink at Plato's feet to indicate that he will document the final speech of Socrates. Sitting to the right of Socrates is Crito, a good friend of Socrates, who has his arm on his leg. Crito is sitting on a bench with an inscription of the symbol of the Athenian state. The wife of Socrates, Xanthippe, is in the left background in a red robe. She waves at us while walking away.

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<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socrates>

Socrates



A marble head of Socrates in the [Louvre](#) (copy of a lost bronze head by [Lysippus](#))^[1]

Born	c. 470 BC Deme Alopece , Athens
Died	399 BC (aged approx. 71) Athens
Cause of death	Forced suicide by poisoning
Spouse(s)	Xanthippe , Myrto (disputed)
Children	Lamprocles , Menexenus , Sophroniscus
Family	Sophroniscus (father), Phaenarete (mother), Patrocles (half-brother)
Era	Ancient Greek philosophy
Region	Western philosophy
School	Classical Greek philosophy

Notable students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plato • Xenophon • Antisthenes • Aristippus • Alcibiades • Critias
Main interests	Epistemology , ethics , teleology
Notable ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social gadfly • Socratic dialogue • Socratic intellectualism • Socratic irony • Socratic method • Socratic paradox • Socratic questioning • "The unexamined life is not worth living"

Socrates (/ˈsɒkrətiːz/, <See **Tfd**>Greek: Σωκράτης, translit. *Sōkrátēs*, c. 470 – 399 BC) was a [Greek philosopher](#) from [Athens](#) who is credited as the founder of [Western philosophy](#) and as among the first [moral philosophers](#) of the [ethical](#) tradition of thought. An enigmatic figure, Socrates authored no texts and is known mainly through the posthumous accounts of [classical writers](#), particularly his students [Plato](#) and [Xenophon](#). These accounts are written as [dialogues](#), in which Socrates and his interlocutors examine a subject in the style of question and answer; they gave rise to the [Socratic dialogue](#) literary genre. Contradictory accounts of Socrates make a reconstruction of his philosophy nearly impossible, a situation known as the [Socratic problem](#). Socrates was a polarizing figure in Athenian society. In 399 BC, he was accused of [impiety](#) and corrupting the youth. After [a trial](#) that lasted a day, he was [sentenced to death](#). He spent his last day in prison, refusing offers to help him escape.

[Plato's dialogues](#) are among the most comprehensive accounts of Socrates to survive from antiquity. They demonstrate the Socratic approach to areas of philosophy including [epistemology](#) and [ethics](#). The Platonic Socrates lends his name to the concept of the [Socratic method](#), and also to [Socratic irony](#). The Socratic method of questioning, or [elenchus](#), takes shape in dialogue using short questions and answers, epitomized by those Platonic texts in which Socrates and his interlocutors examine various aspects of an issue or an abstract meaning, usually relating to one of the virtues, and find themselves at an [impasse](#), completely unable to define what they thought they understood. Socrates is known for [proclaiming his total ignorance](#); he used to say that the only thing he was aware of was his ignorance, seeking to imply that the realization of our ignorance is the first step in philosophizing.

Socrates exerted a strong influence on philosophers in later [antiquity](#) and has continued to do so in the [modern era](#). He was studied by medieval and Islamic scholars and played an important role in the thought of the [Italian Renaissance](#), particularly within the [humanist movement](#). Interest in him continued unabated, as reflected in the works of [Søren Kierkegaard](#) and [Friedrich Nietzsche](#). Depictions of Socrates in art, literature, and popular culture have made him a widely known figure in the Western philosophical tradition.

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Socratic problem

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socratic_problem

In historical scholarship, the **Socratic problem** (also called **Socratic question**) concerns attempts at reconstructing a historical and philosophical image of [Socrates](#) based on the variable, and sometimes contradictory, nature of the existing sources on his life. Scholars rely upon extant sources, such as those of contemporaries like [Aristophanes](#) or disciples of Socrates like [Plato](#) and [Xenophon](#), for knowing anything about Socrates. However, these sources contain contradictory details of his life, words, and beliefs when taken together. This complicates the attempts at reconstructing the beliefs and philosophical views held by the historical Socrates. It has become apparent to scholarship that this problem is seemingly impossible to clarify and thus perhaps now classified as unsolvable. Early proposed solutions to the matter still pose significant problems today.

Socrates was the main character in most of [Plato](#)'s dialogues and was a genuine historical figure. It is widely understood that in later dialogues, Plato used the character Socrates to give voice to views that were his own. Besides Plato, three other important sources exist for the study of Socrates: [Aristophanes](#), [Aristotle](#), and [Xenophon](#). Since no writings by Socrates himself survive to the modern era, his actual views must be discerned from the sometimes contradictory reports of these four sources. The main sources for the historical Socrates are the *Sokratikoi logoi*, or [Socratic dialogues](#), which are reports of conversations apparently involving Socrates.^[5] Most information is found in the works of [Plato](#) and [Xenophon](#).

There are also four sources extant in fragmentary states: [Aeschines of Sphettus](#), [Antisthenes](#), [Euclid of Megara](#), and [Phaedo of Elis](#). In addition, there are two satirical commentaries on Socrates. One is [Aristophanes](#)'s play *The Clouds*, which humorously attacks Socrates. The other is two fragments from the *Silloi* by the [Pyrrhonist](#) philosopher [Timon of Phlius](#),^[10] satirizing [dogmatic](#) philosophers.

History of the problem

Efforts have been made by writers for centuries to address the problem. According to one scholar (Patzner) the number of works with any significance in this issue, prior to the nineteenth century, are few indeed. [G.E. Lessing](#) caused a flurry of interest in the problem in 1768. A methodology for analysis was posited, by study of Platonic sources, in 1820 with Socher. A break of scholarly impasse in respect to understanding, resulted from Campbell making a [stylometric](#) analysis in 1867.

An essay written by [Friedrich Schleiermacher](#) in 1815 ("The Worth of Socrates as a Philosopher"), published 1818 (English translation 1833) is considered the most significant and influential toward developing an understanding of the problem.

Throughout the 20th century, two strains of interpretation arose: the literary contextualists, who tended to interpret Socratic dialogues based on literary criticism, and the analysts, who focus much more heavily on the actual arguments contained within the different texts.

Early in the 21st century, most of the scholars concerned have settled to agreement instead of argument about the nature of the significance of ancient textual sources in relation to this problem.

The Trial of Socrates

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trial_of_Socrates

<i>The Trial of Socrates</i>	
Decided	399 BCE
Verdict	Guilty
Charge	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Failing to acknowledge the gods that the city acknowledges• Corruption of the Youth
Citations	Plato; Xenophon; Diogenes Laertius
Case history	
Subsequent action	Socrates sentenced to death
Court membership	
Judge sitting	501 +/- jury members in Athens
Case opinions	
280 jurors found the defendant guilty while 221 found him innocent	

Trial of Socrates

In 399 BC, Socrates was formally accused of corrupting the minds of the youth of Athens, and for [asebeia](#) (impiety), i.e. worshipping false gods and failing to worship the gods of Athens. At the trial, Socrates defended himself unsuccessfully. He was found guilty by a majority vote cast by a jury of hundreds of male Athenian citizens and, according to the custom, proposed his own penalty: that he should be given free food and housing by the state for the services he rendered to the city, or alternatively, that he be fined one [mina](#) of silver (according to him, all he had). The jurors declined his offer and ordered the death penalty.

Socrates was charged in a politically tense climate. In 404 BC, the Athenians had been crushed by Spartans at the decisive naval [Battle of Aegospotami](#), and subsequently, the Spartans laid siege to Athens. They replaced the democratic government with a new, pro-oligarchic government, named the [Thirty Tyrants](#). Because of their tyrannical measures, some Athenians organized to overthrow the Tyrants—and, indeed, they managed to do so briefly—until a Spartan request for aid from the Thirty arrived and a

compromise was sought. When the Spartans left again, however, democrats seized the opportunity to kill the oligarchs and reclaim the government of Athens.

The accusations against Socrates were initiated by a poet, [Meletus](#), who asked for the death penalty in accordance with the charge of *asebeia*.^[61] Other accusers were [Anytus](#) and Lycon. After a month or two, in late spring or early summer, the trial started and likely went on for most of one day. There were two main sources for the religion-based accusations. First, Socrates had rejected the anthropomorphism of traditional Greek religion by denying that the gods did bad things like humans do. Second, he seemed to believe in a [daimonion](#)—an inner voice with, as his accusers suggested, divine origin

Plato's *Apology* starts with Socrates answering the various rumours against him that have given rise to the indictment. First, Socrates defends himself against the rumour that he is an atheist [naturalist philosopher](#), as portrayed in Aristophanes's *The Clouds*; or a [sophist](#). Against the allegations of corrupting the youth, Socrates answers that he has never corrupted anyone intentionally, since corrupting someone would carry the risk of being corrupted back in return, and that would be illogical, since corruption is undesirable. On the second charge, Socrates asks for clarification. Meletus responds by repeating the accusation that Socrates is an atheist. Socrates notes the contradiction between atheism and worshipping false gods. He then claims that he is "God's gift" to the Athenians, since his activities ultimately benefit Athens; thus, in condemning him to death, Athens itself will be the greatest loser. After that, he says that even though no human can reach wisdom, seeking it is the best thing someone can do, implying money and prestige are not as precious as commonly thought.



The Death of Socrates. Socrates was visited by friends in his last night in prison. His discussion with them gave rise to Plato's *Crito* and *Phaedo*.

Socrates was given the chance to offer alternative punishments for himself after being found guilty. He could have requested permission to flee Athens and live in exile, but he did not do so. According to Xenophon, Socrates made no proposals, while according to Plato he suggested free meals should be provided for him daily in recognition of his worth to Athens or, more in earnest, that a fine should be imposed on him. The jurors favoured the death penalty by making him drink a cup of [hemlock](#) (a poisonous liquid). In return, Socrates warned jurors and Athenians that criticism of them by his many disciples was inescapable, unless they became good men. After a delay caused by Athenian religious ceremonies, Socrates spent his last day in prison. His friends visited him and offered him an opportunity to escape, which he declined.

The question of what motivated Athenians to convict Socrates remains controversial among scholars. There are two theories. The first is that Socrates was convicted on religious grounds; the second, that he was accused and convicted for political reasons. Another, more recent, interpretation synthesizes the religious and political theories, arguing that religion and state were not separate in ancient Athens.

The argument for religious persecution is supported by the fact that Plato's and Xenophon's accounts of the trial mostly focus on the charges of impiety. In those accounts, Socrates is portrayed as making no effort to dispute the fact that he did not

believe in the Athenian gods. Against this argument stands the fact that many skeptics and atheist philosophers during this time were not prosecuted. According to the argument for political persecution, Socrates was targeted because he was perceived as a threat to democracy. It was true that Socrates did not stand for democracy during the reign of the Thirty Tyrants and that most of his pupils were against the democrats. The case for it being a political persecution is usually challenged by the existence of an amnesty that was granted to Athenian citizens in 403 BC to prevent escalation to civil war after the fall of the Thirty. However, as the text from Socrates's trial and other texts reveal, the accusers could have fuelled their rhetoric using events prior to 403 BC.

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Legacy

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socrates>

Hellenistic era



Carnelian gem imprint representing Socrates, Rome, 1st century BC–1st century AD (left);
Wall painting at a house depicting Socrates, 1st–5th century AD, Museum of Ephesus (right)

Socrates's impact was immense in philosophy after his death. With the exception of the [Epicureans](#) and the [Pyrrhonists](#), almost all philosophical currents after Socrates traced their roots to him: Plato's Academy, Aristotle's Lyceum, the Cynics, and the Stoics. Interest in Socrates kept increasing until the third century AD. The various schools differed in response to fundamental questions such as the purpose of life or the nature of [arete](#) (virtue), since Socrates had not handed them an answer, and therefore, philosophical schools subsequently diverged greatly in their interpretation of his thought. He was considered to have shifted the focus of philosophy from a study of the natural world, as was the case for pre-Socratic philosophers, to a study of human affairs.

Immediate followers of Socrates were his pupils, [Euclid of Megara](#), [Aristippus](#), and [Antisthenes](#), who drew differing conclusions among themselves and followed independent trajectories. The full doctrines of Socrates's pupils are difficult to reconstruct. Antisthenes had a profound contempt of material goods. According to him, virtue was all that mattered. Diogenes and the Cynics continued this line of thought. On the opposite end, Aristippus endorsed the accumulation of wealth and lived a luxurious life. After leaving Athens and returning to his home city of [Cyrene](#), he founded the [Cyrenaic philosophical school](#) which was based on [hedonism](#), and endorsing living an easy life with physical pleasures. His school passed to his grandson, bearing the same name. There is a dialogue in Xenophon's work in which Aristippus claims he wants to live without wishing to rule or be ruled by others. In addition, Aristippus maintained

a [skeptical](#) stance on [epistemology](#), claiming that we can be certain only of our own feelings. This view resonates with the Socratic understanding of ignorance. [Euclid](#) was a contemporary of Socrates. After Socrates's trial and death, he left Athens for the nearby town of [Megara](#), where he founded a school, named the Megarians. His theory was built on the pre-Socratic [monism](#) of [Parmenides](#). Euclid continued Socrates's thought, focusing on the nature of virtue.

The [Stoics](#) relied heavily on Socrates. They applied the Socratic method as a tool to avoid inconsistencies. Their moral doctrines focused on how to live a smooth life through wisdom and virtue. The Stoics assigned virtue a crucial role in attaining happiness and also prioritized the relation between goodness and ethical excellence, all of which echoed Socratic thought. At the same time, the philosophical current of [Platonism](#) claimed Socrates as its predecessor, in ethics and in its theory of knowledge. [Arcesilaus](#), who became the head of the Academy about 80 years after its founding by Plato, radically changed the Academy's doctrine to what is now known as [Academic Skepticism](#), centered on the Socratic philosophy of ignorance. The Academic Skeptics competed with the Stoics over who was Socrates's true heir with regard to ethics. While the Stoics insisted on knowledge-based ethics, Arcesilaus relied on Socratic ignorance. The Stoics' reply to Arcesilaus was that Socratic ignorance was part of Socratic irony (they themselves disapproved the use of irony), an argument that ultimately became the dominant narrative of Socrates in later antiquity.

While Aristotle considered Socrates an important philosopher, Socrates was not a central figure in Aristotelian thought. One of Aristotle's pupils, [Aristoxenus](#) even authored a book detailing Socrates's scandals.

The [Epicureans](#) were antagonistic to Socrates. They attacked him for superstition, criticizing his belief in his *daimonion* and his regard for the oracle at Delphi. They also criticized Socrates for his character and various faults, and focusing mostly on his irony, which was deemed inappropriate for a philosopher and unseemly for a teacher.

The [Pyrrhonists](#) were also antagonistic to Socrates, accusing him of being a prater about ethics, who engaged in mock humility, and who sneered at and mocked people.

Medieval world



Depiction of Socrates in a manuscript by [Al-Mubashshir ibn Fatik](#)

Socratic thought found its way to the [Islamic Middle East](#) alongside that of Aristotle and the Stoics. Plato's works on Socrates, as well as other ancient Greek literature, were translated into Arabic by early Muslim scholars such as [Al-Kindi](#), [Jabir ibn Hayyan](#), and

the [Mu'tazila](#). For Muslim scholars, Socrates was hailed and admired for combining his ethics with his lifestyle, perhaps because of the resemblance in this regard with [Muhammad](#)'s personality. Socratic doctrines were altered to match Islamic faith: according to Muslim scholars, Socrates made arguments for monotheism and for the temporality of this world and rewards in the next life. His influence in the Arabic-speaking world continues to the present day.

In medieval times, little of Socrates's thought survived in the Christian world as a whole; however, works on Socrates from Christian scholars such as [Lactantius](#), [Eusebius](#) and [Augustine](#) were maintained in the [Byzantine Empire](#), where Socrates was studied under a Christian lens. After the fall of Constantinople, many of the texts were brought back into the world of Roman Christianity, where they were translated into Latin. Overall, ancient Socratic philosophy, like the rest of classical literature before the [Renaissance](#), was addressed with skepticism in the Christian world at first.

During the early [Italian Renaissance](#), two different narratives of Socrates developed. On the one hand, the [humanist movement](#) revived interest in classical authors. [Leonardo Bruni](#) translated many of Plato's Socratic dialogues, while his pupil [Giannozzo Manetti](#) authored a well-circulated book, a *Life of Socrates*. They both presented a civic version of Socrates, according to which Socrates was a humanist and a supporter of [republicanism](#). Bruni and Manetti were interested in defending secularism as a non-sinful way of life; presenting a view of Socrates that was aligned with Christian morality assisted their cause. In doing so, they had to censor parts of his dialogues, especially those which appeared to promote homosexuality or any possibility of [pederasty](#) (with Alcibiades), or which suggested that the Socratic *daimon* was a god. On the other hand, a different picture of Socrates was presented by Italian Neoplatonists, led by the philosopher and priest [Marsilio Ficino](#). Ficino was impressed by Socrates's un-hierarchical and informal way teaching, which he tried to replicate. Ficino portrayed a holy picture of Socrates, finding parallels with the life of Jesus Christ. For Ficino and his followers, Socratic ignorance signified his acknowledgement that all wisdom is God-given (through the Socratic *daimon*).

Modern times



Socrates along with his wives (he was married once or twice) and students, appears in many paintings. Here *Socrates, his two Wives, and Alcibiades*, a painting by the [Dutch Golden Age](#) artist [Reyer van Blommendael](#). Often, his wife Xanthippe, alone or with [Myrto](#) (the other alleged wife of Socrates) is depicted emptying a pot of urine (hydria) over Socrates.

In [early modern France](#), Socrates's image was dominated by features of his private life rather than his philosophical thought, in various novels and satirical plays. Some thinkers used Socrates to highlight and comment upon controversies of their own era, like [Théophile de Viau](#) who portrayed a Christianized Socrates accused of atheism, while

for [Voltaire](#), the figure of Socrates represented a reason-based theist. [Michel de Montaigne](#) wrote extensively on Socrates, linking him to rationalism as a counterweight to contemporary religious fanatics.

In the 18th century, [German idealism](#) revived philosophical interest in Socrates, mainly through [Hegel](#)'s work. For Hegel, Socrates marked a turning point in the history of humankind by the introduction of the principle of free subjectivity or [self-determination](#). While Hegel hails Socrates for his contribution, he nonetheless justifies the Athenian court, for Socrates's insistence upon self-determination would be destructive of the [Sittlichkeit](#) (a Hegelian term signifying the way of life as shaped by the institutions and laws of the State). Also, Hegel sees the Socratic use of rationalism as a continuation of Protagoras' focus on human reasoning (as encapsulated in the motto [homo mensura](#): "man is the measure of all things"), but modified: it is our reasoning that can help us reach objective conclusions about reality. Also, Hegel considered Socrates as a predecessor of later ancient sceptic philosophers, even though he never clearly explained why.

[Søren Kierkegaard](#) considered Socrates his teacher, and authored his master's thesis on him, [The Concept of Irony with Continual Reference to Socrates](#). There he argues that Socrates is not a moral philosopher but is purely an ironist. He also focused on Socrates's avoidance of writing: for Kierkegaard, this avoidance was a sign of humility, deriving from Socrates's acceptance of his ignorance. Not only did Socrates not write anything down, according to Kierkegaard, but his contemporaries misconstrued and misunderstood him as a philosopher, leaving us with an almost impossible task in comprehending Socratic thought. Only Plato's *Apology* was close to the real Socrates, in Kierkegaard's view. In his writings, he revisited Socrates quite frequently; in his later work, Kierkegaard found ethical elements in Socratic thought. Socrates was not only a subject of study for Kierkegaard, he was a model as well: Kierkegaard paralleled his task as a philosopher to Socrates. He writes, "The only analogy I have before me is Socrates; my task is a Socratic task, to audit the definition of what it is to be a Christian", with his aim being to bring society closer to the Christian ideal, since he believed that Christianity had become a formality, void of any Christian essence. Kierkegaard denied being a Christian, as Socrates denied possessing any knowledge.

[Friedrich Nietzsche](#) resented Socrates's contributions to Western culture. In his first book, [The Birth of Tragedy](#) (1872), Nietzsche held Socrates responsible for what he saw as the deterioration of ancient Greek civilization during the 4th century BC and after. For Nietzsche, Socrates turned the scope of philosophy from pre-Socratic naturalism to rationalism and intellectualism. He writes: "I conceive of [the Presocratics] as precursors to a reformation of the Greeks: but not of Socrates"; "with Empedocles and Democritus the Greeks were well on their way towards taking the correct measure of human existence, its unreason, its suffering; they never reached this goal, thanks to Socrates". The effect, Nietzsche proposed, was a perverse situation that had continued down to his day: our culture is a Socratic culture, he believed. In a later publication, [The Twilight of the Idols](#) (1887), Nietzsche continued his offensive against Socrates, focusing on the arbitrary linking of reason to virtue and happiness in Socratic thinking. He writes: "I try to understand from what partial and idiosyncratic states the Socratic problem is to be derived: his equation of reason = virtue = happiness. It was with this absurdity of a doctrine of identity that he fascinated: ancient philosophy never again freed itself [from this fascination]". From the late 19th century until the early 20th, the most common explanation of Nietzsche's hostility towards Socrates was his anti-rationalism; he considered Socrates the father of European [rationalism](#). In the mid-20th century,

philosopher [Walter Kaufmann](#) published an article arguing that Nietzsche admired Socrates. Current mainstream opinion is that Nietzsche was ambivalent towards Socrates.



The statue of Socrates outside the [National Library of Uruguay, Montevideo](#)

[Continental philosophers Hannah Arendt, Leo Strauss and Karl Popper](#), after experiencing the horrors of [World War II](#), amidst the rise of totalitarian regimes, saw Socrates as an icon of individual conscience. Arendt, in [Eichmann in Jerusalem](#) (1963), suggests that Socrates's constant questioning and self-reflection could prevent the [banality of evil](#). Strauss considers Socrates's political thought as paralleling Plato's. He sees an elitist Socrates in Plato's *Republic* as exemplifying why the *polis* is not, and could not be, an ideal way of organizing life, since philosophical truths cannot be digested by the masses. Popper takes the opposite view: he argues that Socrates opposes Plato's totalitarian ideas. For Popper, Socratic individualism, along with Athenian democracy, imply Popper's concept of the "open society" as described in his [Open Society and Its Enemies](#) (1945).

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List of cultural depictions of Socrates

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_cultural_depictions_of_Socrates

Socrates has frequently been featured in or the subject of literature, theater, film, television, and art.

Art



[Aeschines](#) and Socrates in [Raphael's The School of Athens](#)



Pietro Testa's etching of the *Symposium* (1648)

- [*The Apotheosis of Homer*](#) (1827)
- [*The Death of Socrates*](#) (1787)
- [*Double Herm of Socrates and Seneca*](#) (3rd century AD)
- [*The School of Athens*](#) (c. 1511)
- [*Socrates*](#) (c. 1950)
- [*Socrates, his two Wives, and Alcibiades*](#) (1660s)
- [*Symposium \(Feuerbach\)*](#) (1869)

Literature

- [*Alcibiades the Schoolboy*](#) (1652)
- [*Creation*](#) (1981)
Historical fiction novel by [Gore Vidal](#) in which a Achaemenid Persian diplomat meets historical figures, including Socrates
- [*De genio Socratis*](#)
- [*Divine Comedy*](#)
- [*The Just City*](#) (2015)
- [*The Last of the Wine*](#) (1956)
- [*The Plot to Save Socrates*](#) (2006)
- *The True [*Apology*](#) of Socrates* by [Kostas Varnalis](#) (1931)

Music

- ["Bruces' Philosophers Song"](#) (1973)
- [*Der geduldige Socrates*](#) (1721)
- [*Serenade after Plato's "Symposium"*](#) (1954)
- [*Socrate*](#) (1919)

Screen

- [*Barefoot in Athens*](#) (1966)

[Hallmark Hall of Fame](#) television film on the last days of Socrates, starring [Peter Ustinov](#) as Socrates

- [*Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure*](#) (1989)

Science fiction comedy film in which time-traveling teenagers assemble historical figures, including Socrates, portrayed by [Tony Steedman](#), for a high school presentation. The title characters continuously pronounce his name as the two syllable 'So-Crates'

- [*Meeting of Minds*](#) (1977–1981)
- [*The Philosophers' Football Match*](#) (1972), in which he scores the winning goal
- [*Socrates*](#) (1971)

Stage

- [*The Clouds*](#) (423 BC)

Ancient Greek comedy by [Aristophanes](#) that lampoons intellectualism in [classical Athens](#); Socrates features prominently

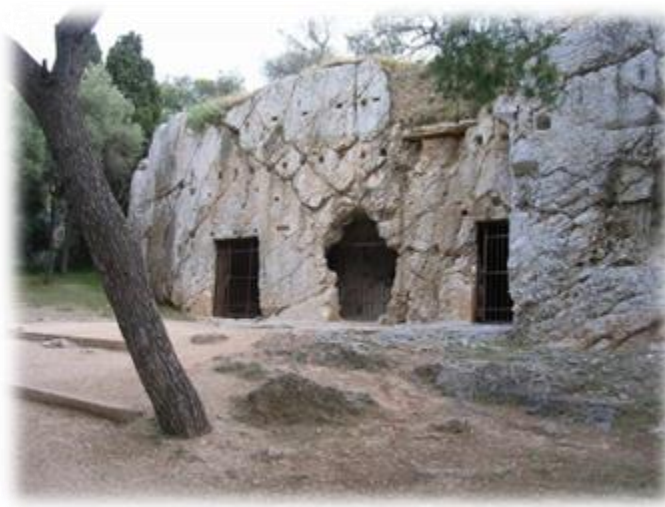
- [*Socrates*](#) (1759)
- [*Socrates on Trial*](#) (2007)

Video Games

- [*Assassin's Creed Odyssey*](#) (2018)

Socrates (stylized as Sokrates) is a side character in the Ubisoft game where the player can complete quests given by Socrates which involve philosophical dilemmas, much to the annoyance of the main character.

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Socrates' Prison, Athens

Quintessential Quotable

QUOTES

<https://blog.xoxoday.com/events/famous-socrates-quotes/>

Socrates, the ancient Greek philosopher, is known for his profound wisdom and deep insights into human nature and morality.

His teachings have influenced Western philosophy and continue to inspire people to question, reflect, and seek truth.

Socrates' famous quotes are timeless and offer valuable insights into various aspects of life, including ethics, wisdom, and self-awareness.

1. "An unexamined life is not worth living."
2. "The only true wisdom is in knowing you know nothing."
3. "I know that I am intelligent because I know that I know nothing."
4. "The secret of change is to focus all of your energy, not on fighting the old, but on building the new."
5. "He who is not a good servant will not be a good master."
6. "To find yourself, think for yourself."
7. "The greatest way to live with honor in this world is to be what we pretend to be."
8. "The heaviest penalty for declining to rule is to be ruled by someone inferior to yourself."
9. "The unexamined life is not worth living for a human being."
10. "The only true freedom comes from knowledge."
11. "The first step to wisdom is admitting your own ignorance."
12. "The harder you work for something, the greater you'll feel when you achieve it."
13. "There is only one good, knowledge, and one evil, ignorance."

14. "True wisdom comes to each of us when we realize how little we understand about life, ourselves, and the world around us."
15. "The mind is everything; what you think, you become."
16. "Be slow to fall into friendship, but when you are in, continue firm and constant."
17. "To be is to do."
18. "The way to gain a good reputation is to endeavor to be what you desire to appear."
19. "The greatest mistake you can make in life is to continually fear you will make one."
20. "Let him that would move the world first move himself."
21. "Education is the kindling of a flame, not the filling of a vessel."
22. "The only true evil is ignorance, and the only true good is knowledge."
23. "Wisdom begins in wonder."
24. "The more I learn, the more I realize how much I don't know."
25. "Beware the barrenness of a busy life."
26. "Strong minds discuss ideas, average minds discuss events, weak minds discuss people."
27. "The secret to change is to focus all your energy, not on fighting the old, but on building the new."
28. "Know thyself."
29. "An honest man is always a child."
30. "To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else is the greatest accomplishment."
31. "The only true possession you have is your own self."
32. "The unexamined life is not worth living for a human being."
33. "There is only one good, knowledge, and one evil, ignorance."
34. "An education obtained with money is worse than no education at all."
35. "Wonder is the beginning of wisdom."

36. "He is richest who is content with the least, for content is the wealth of nature."

37. "I cannot teach anybody anything. I can only make them think."

38. "The way to gain a good reputation is to endeavor to be what you desire to appear."

39. "An honest man is always a child."

40. "The secret of happiness, you see, is not found in seeking more, but in developing the capacity to enjoy less."

41. "To move the world, we must first move ourselves."

42. "Let him who would be moved to convince others, be first moved to convince himself."

43. "The only true wisdom is in knowing you know nothing."

44. "True wisdom comes to each of us when we realize how little we understand about life, ourselves, and the world around us."

45. "Prefer knowledge to wealth, for the one is transitory, the other perpetual."

46. "Courage is knowing what not to fear."

47. "The greatest way to live with honor in this world is to be what we pretend to be."

48. "I am not an Athenian or a Greek, but a citizen of the world."

49. "The greatest blessings granted to mankind are within us and within our reach."

50. "He who is not a good servant will not be a good master."

51. "When desire, having rejected reason and overpowered judgment which leads to right, is set in the direction of the pleasure which beauty can inspire, and when again under the influence of its kindred desires it is moved with violent motion towards the beauty of corporeal forms, it acquires a surname from this very violent motion, and is called love."

52. "Worthless people live only to eat and drink; people of worth eat and drink only to live."

53. "The greatest glory in living lies not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall."

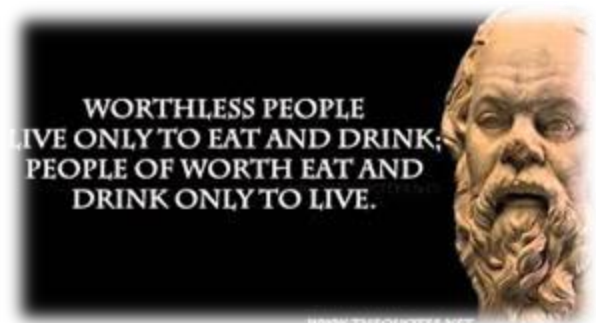
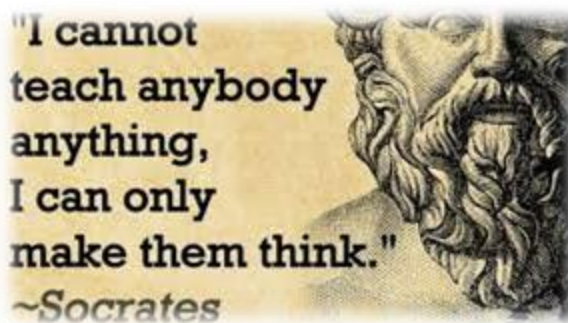
54. "A system of morality which is based on relative emotional values is a mere illusion, a thoroughly vulgar conception which has nothing sound in it and nothing true."

55. "The mind is everything; what you think, you become."

56. "Employ your time in improving yourself by other men's writings so that you shall come easily by what others have labored hard for."
57. "He who is not a good servant will not be a good master."
58. "To find yourself, think for yourself."
59. "The secret of change is to focus all your energy not on fighting the old but on building the new."
60. "The only true failure is the failure to try."

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Disciples of

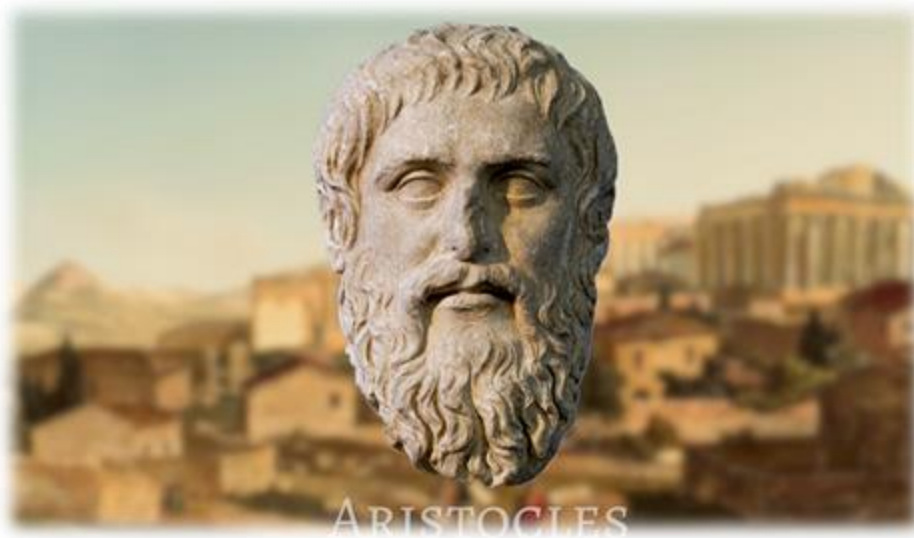
Socrates

<https://erasofphilosophy.medium.com/followers-of-socrates-close-friends-students-cf9e430fb8f1>

Socrates was both loved and admired by a lot of his fellow citizens. But he was also hated for his different way of looking into sensitive things like religion, God, and other obvious beliefs.

However, he attracted some of the greatest minds of his time to his unique personality. As a result, we can see some of the greatest philosophers who shaped the world. They are none other than Socrates' noted students. Here is a list of them.

1. Plato



Among the notable individuals who studied under Socrates, Plato stands out as one of the most prominent figures. Philosopher Plato, whose real name was Aristocles is often considered Socrates' most famous pupil.

Born into an aristocratic Athenian family, Plato initially aspired to pursue a political career but was drawn to philosophy after encountering Socrates.

Plato's dialogues, which feature Socrates as the main character, provide valuable insights into Socratic philosophy and its applications in various aspects of life. **The truth is, that most of what we know about Socrates comes from the writings of Plato.**

2. Xenophon



Xenophon

Xenophon, another student of Socrates, offered a different perspective on Socratic philosophy through his writings. Born into a wealthy Athenian family, Xenophon was initially attracted to military pursuits but later became interested in philosophy.

He became one of Socrates' disciples and recorded his conversations with the philosopher in his works, providing additional insights into Socrates' teachings and character.

Xenophon's philosophy is deeply rooted in preserving and interpreting the teachings of Socrates. Xenophon emphasizes the practical aspects of Socrates' teachings.

We have an in-depth blog listing his [top 5 students](#) and their contributions to the history of philosophy. To learn more, read the linked blog.

Lesser-Known Students/Followers

In addition to the well-known students of Socrates mentioned earlier, many other exciting figures learned from him. But most of them were less famous than the previous ones. Here's a look at some of them:

Aeschines of Sphettus

A lesser-known but significant figure in Athenian philosophy was Aeschines of Sphettus. Living from around 425 to 350 BC, he was a contemporary of Socrates and became his pupil during his youth. To avoid confusion with another prominent Athenian named Aeschines, historians often call him "Aeschines Socraticus."

He was a Socratic philosopher. There is some debate about the nature of Socrates and Aeschines' relationship. However, Aeschines is mentioned in Plato's dialogues, a key source of information about Socrates and his circle.

Aeschines of Sphettus was reportedly present at both Socrates' trial and execution, according to Plato's account.

Following Socrates' death, Aeschines emulated Plato by composing philosophical dialogues featuring Socrates as the main character.

Though these writings are known only through fragments and quotes from later authors, Aeschines was admired in ancient times for his faithful depiction of Socratic conversations.

Scholars claim his work was more similar to Plato's style than Xenophon's in presenting these dialogues.

Aristodemus of Cydathenaeum:

A Devoted Follower of Socrates

Plato's "Symposium" portrays Aristodemus as a short and possibly lower-class individual who didn't wear shoes. Xenophon uses a similar term, referring to him as "Aristodemus the dwarf." Interestingly, Aristodemus shared his deme (a local Athenian district) with the famous playwright Aristophanes, who also appears in Plato's "Symposium."

While details about his life are scarce, scholars believe he was part of an earlier generation of Socrates' students. This theory is based on his portrayal and the assumption that he appears in Aristophanes' comedy "Banqueters" from 427 BCE. Another clue is his absence from accounts of Socrates' final days in 399 BCE, suggesting he might have died before then.

Cebes of Thebes

Cebes of Thebes was a student of Socrates and is featured in Plato's dialogues "Phaedo" and "Crito." He is depicted as a thoughtful and serious individual who grapples with philosophical questions. Plato's dialogues offer valuable insights into Socrates' teachings and their impact on his students.

Chaerephon

Chaerephon was a friend and associate of Socrates, mentioned in several of Plato's dialogues. He is described as a strong supporter of Socrates and his beliefs. These dialogues provide a window into the relationships Socrates cultivated with his students.

Phaedrus (Athenian)

Phaedrus is a character in Plato's dialogue of the same name. He is an Athenian nobleman interested in rhetoric and philosophy. Plato's dialogues are a primary source for many of Socrates' students, though some scholars argue for a more critical approach to portraying Socrates' ideas.

Simon the Shoemaker

Living in Athens during the late 5th century BC was a shoemaker called Simon. However, Simon was not an ordinary shoemaker; he was an acquaintance of Socrates and a man deeply interested in philosophy. Our primary source of information about Simon comes from Diogenes Laërtius' book "Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers." Plutarch and Synesius also briefly mention him. Interestingly, a student of Socrates named Phaedo of Elis even wrote a dialogue titled "Simon."

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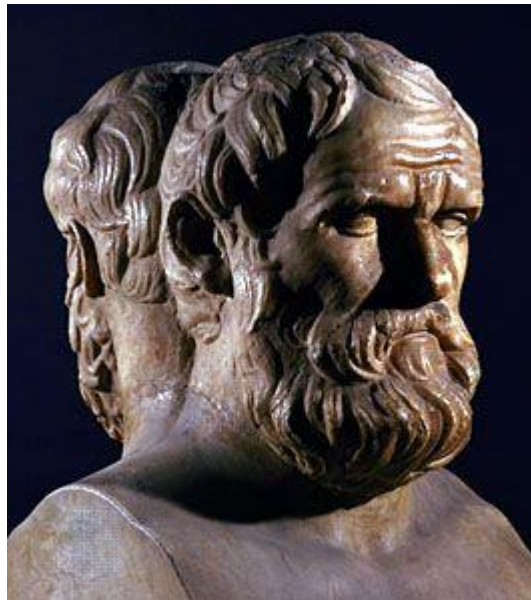
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The public's hatred of Socrates

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Socrates/The-publics-hatred-of-Socrates>

Part of the fascination of [Plato's](#) *Apology* consists in the fact that it presents a man who takes extraordinary steps throughout his life to be of the greatest possible value to his [community](#) but whose efforts, far from earning him the gratitude and honour he thinks he deserves, lead to his condemnation and death at the hands of the very people he seeks to serve. Socrates is painfully aware that he is a hated figure and that this is what has led to the accusations against him. He has little money and no political savvy or influence, and he has paid little attention to his family and household—all in order to serve the public that now reviles him. What went wrong?

The impression created by Aristophanes



**Aristophanes, marble double bust,
early 4th century BCE; in the Louvre, Paris.**

Socrates goes to some length to answer this question. Much of his defense consists not merely in refuting the charges but in offering a complex explanation of why such false accusations should have been brought against him in the first place. Part of the explanation, he believes, is that he has long been misunderstood by the general public. The public, he says, has focused its distrust of certain types of people upon him. He claims that the false impressions of his "first accusers" (as he calls them) derive from a play of [Aristophanes](#) (he is referring to *Clouds*) in which a character called Socrates is seen "swinging about, saying he was walking on air and talking a lot of nonsense about things of which I know nothing at all." The Socrates of Aristophanes' [comedy](#) is the head of a school that investigates every sort of [empirical](#) phenomenon, regards clouds and air as divine substances, denies the existence of any gods but these, studies [language](#) and the art of argument, and uses its knowledge of [rhetorical](#) devices to "make the worse into the stronger argument," as the Socrates of the *Apology* puts it in his speech. Socrates' corruption of the young is also a major theme of *Clouds*: it features a father

(Strepsiades) who attends Socrates' school with his son (Pheidippides) in order to learn how to avoid paying the debts he has incurred because of his son's extravagance. In the end, Pheidippides learns all too well how to use argumentative skills to his advantage; indeed, he prides himself on his ability to prove that it is right for a son to beat his parents. In the end, Strepsiades [denounces](#) Socrates and burns down the building that houses his school.

This play, Socrates says, has created the general impression that he studies celestial and geographic phenomena and, like the [Sophists](#) who travel from city to city, takes a fee for [teaching](#) the young various skills. Not so, says Socrates. He thinks it would be a fine thing to possess the kinds of knowledge these Sophists claim to teach, but he has never discussed these matters with anyone—as his judges should be able to confirm for themselves, because, he says, many of them have heard his conversations.

The [human](#) resistance to self-reflection

But this can only be the beginning of Socrates' explanation, for it leads to further questions. Why should Aristophanes have written in this way about Socrates? The latter must have been a well-known figure in 423, when *Clouds* was produced, for Aristophanes typically wrote about and mocked figures who already were familiar to his audience. Furthermore, if, as Socrates claims, many of his jurors had heard him in discussion and could therefore confirm for themselves that he did not study or teach others about clouds, air, and other such matters and did not take a fee as the Sophists did, then why did they not vote to [acquit](#) him of the charges by an overwhelming majority?

Socrates provides answers to these questions. Long before Aristophanes wrote about him, he had acquired a reputation among his fellow citizens because he spent his days attempting to fulfill his divine mission to cross-examine them and to puncture their confident [belief](#) that they possessed knowledge of the most important matters. Socrates tells the jurors that, as a result of his inquiries, he has learned a bitter lesson about his fellow citizens: not only do they fail to possess the knowledge they claim to have, but they resent having this fact pointed out to them, and they hate him for his insistence that his [reflective](#) way of life and his disavowal of knowledge make him superior to them. The only people who delight in his conversation are the young and wealthy, who have the leisure to spend their days with him. These people imitate him by carrying out their own cross-examinations of their elders. Socrates does admit, then, that he has, to some degree, set one generation against another—and in making this confession, he makes it apparent why some members of the jury may have been convinced, on the basis of their own acquaintance with him, that he has corrupted the city's young.

One of the most subtle components of Socrates' explanation for the hatred he has aroused is his point that people hide the shame they feel when they are unable to withstand his destructive arguments. His reputation as a corrupter of the young and as a Sophist and an [atheist](#) is sustained because it provides people with an ostensibly reasonable explanation of their hatred of him. No one will say, "I hate Socrates because I cannot answer his questions, and he makes me look foolish in front of the young." Instead, people hide their shame and the real source of their anger by seizing on the

general impression that he is the sort of philosopher who casts doubt on traditional [religion](#) and teaches people rhetorical tricks that can be used to make bad arguments look good. These ways of hiding the source of their hatred are all the more potent because they contain at least a grain of truth. Socrates, as both Plato and [Xenophon](#) confirm, is a man who loves to argue: in that respect he is like a Sophist. And his [conception](#) of piety, as revealed by his devotion to the [Delphic oracle](#), is highly unorthodox: in that respect he is like those who deny the existence of the gods.

Socrates believes that this hatred, whose real source is so painful for people to acknowledge, played a crucial role in leading Meletus, Anytus, and Lycon to come forward in court against him; it also makes it so difficult for many members of the jury to acknowledge that he has the highest motives and has done his city a great service. Aristophanes' mockery of Socrates and the legal indictment against him could not possibly have led to his [trial](#) or [conviction](#) were it not for something in a large number of his fellow Athenians that wanted to be rid of him. This is a theme to which Socrates returns several times. He compares himself, at one point, to a gadfly who has been assigned by the god to stir a large and sluggish horse. Note what this implies: the bite of the fly cannot be anything but painful, and it is only natural that the horse would like nothing better than to kill it. After the jury has voted in favour of the [death penalty](#), Socrates tells them that their motive has been their desire to avoid giving a defense of their lives. Something in people resists self-examination: they do not want to answer deep questions about themselves, and they hate those who [cajole](#) them for not doing so or for doing so poorly. At bottom, Socrates thinks that all but a few people will strike out against those who try to stimulate serious [moral](#) reflection in them. That is why he thinks that his trial is not merely the result of unfortuitous events—a mere misunderstanding caused by the work of a popular playwright—but the outcome of psychological forces deep within [human nature](#).

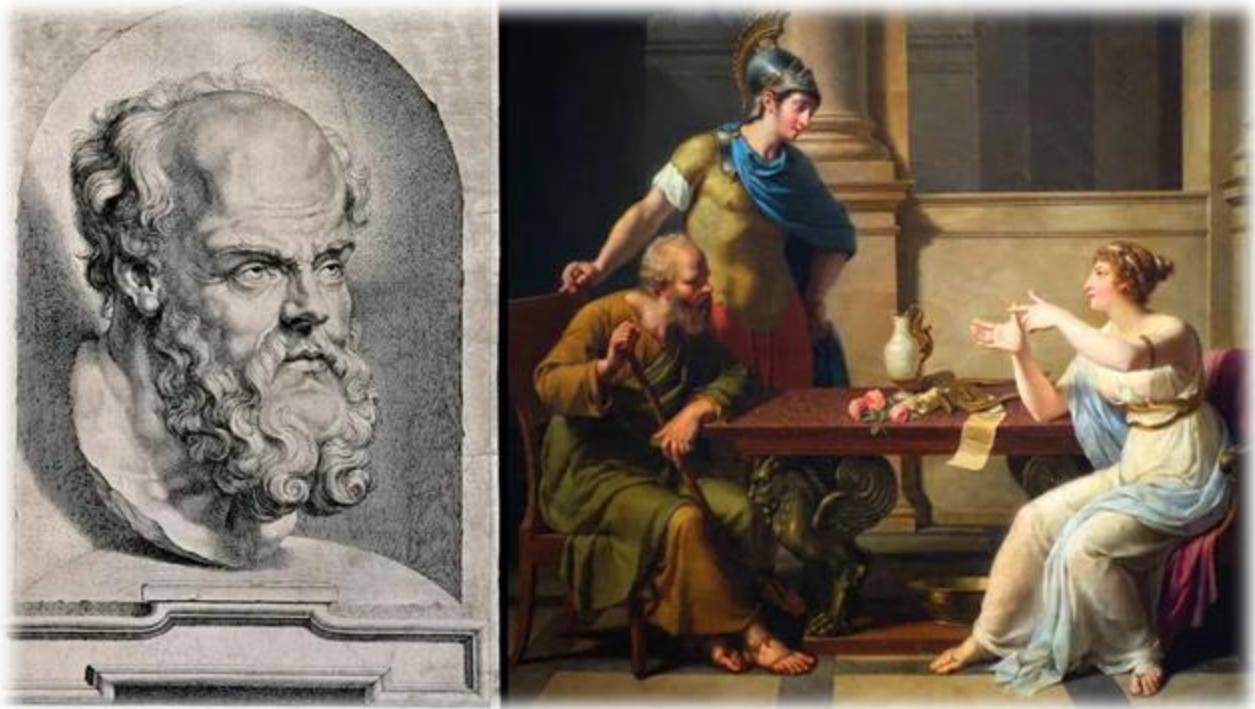
Socrates' criticism of [democracy](#)

Socrates' analysis of the hatred he has incurred is one part of a larger theme that he dwells on throughout his speech. [Athens](#) is a [democracy](#), a city in which the many are the dominant power in politics, and it can therefore be expected to have all the vices of the many. Because most people hate to be tested in argument, they will always take action of some sort against those who provoke them with questions. But that is not the only accusation Socrates brings forward against his city and its politics. He tells his democratic audience that he was right to have withdrawn from political life, because a good person who fights for [justice](#) in a democracy will be killed. In his cross-examination of Meletus, he insists that only a few people can acquire the knowledge necessary for improving the young of any species, and that the many will inevitably do a poor job. He criticizes the Assembly for its illegal actions and the Athenian courts for the ease with which matters of [justice](#) are distorted by emotional pleading. Socrates implies that the very nature of democracy makes it a corrupt [political system](#). Bitter experience has taught him that most people rest content with a superficial understanding of the most urgent human questions. When they are given [great power](#), their shallowness inevitably leads to injustice.



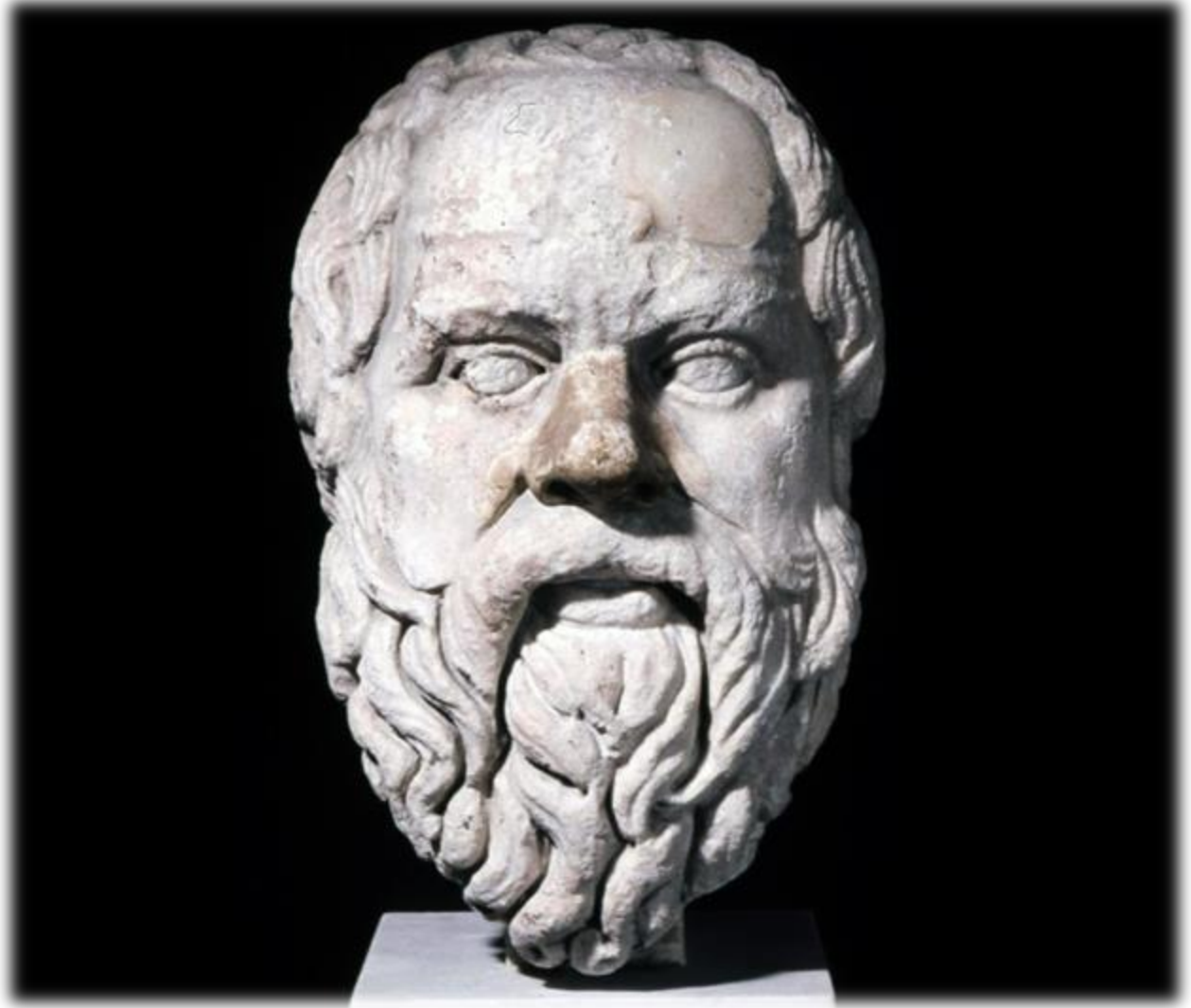
Socrates' Philosophy

<https://www.thecollector.com/socrates-philosophy-ancient-greek-philosopher-legacy/>



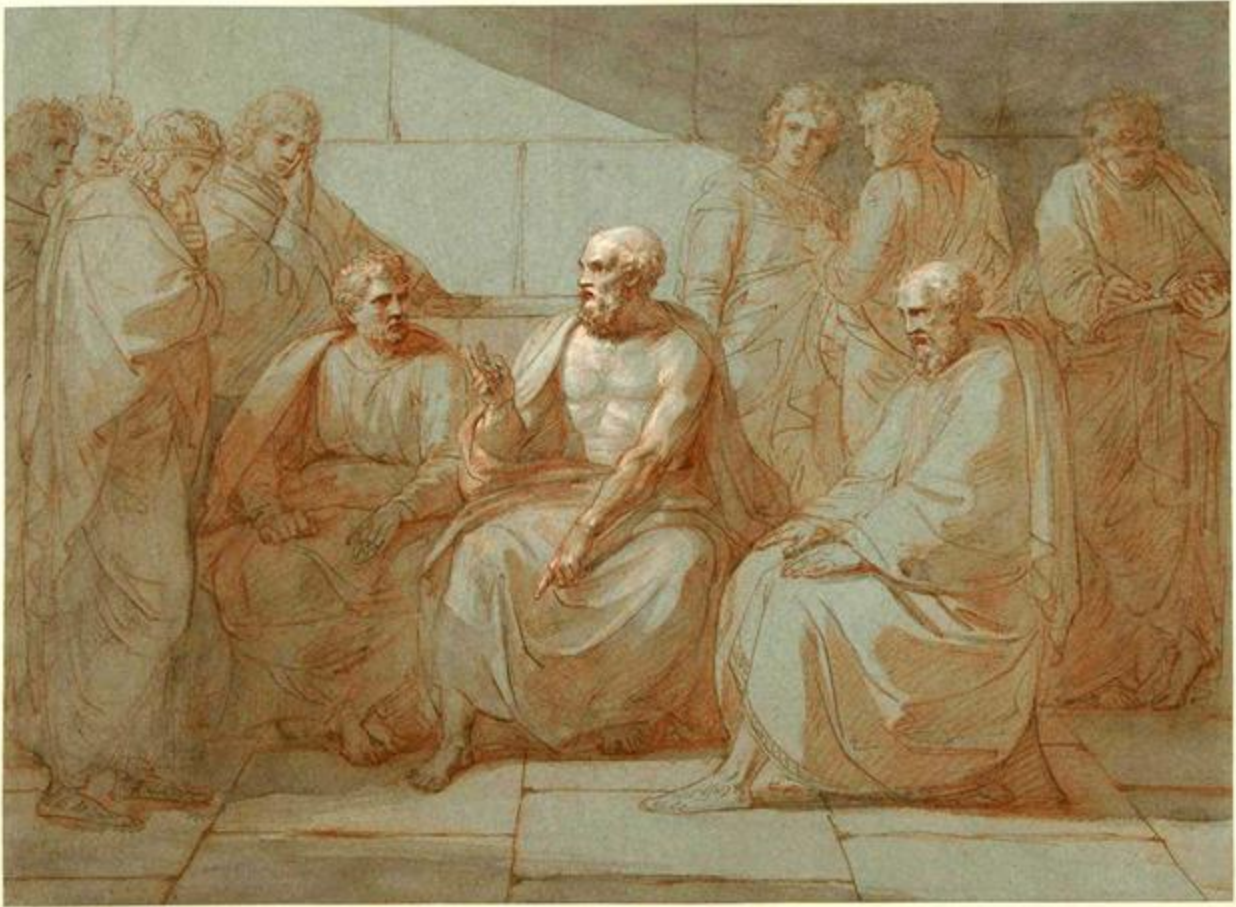
Getting a straight answer from the philosopher [Socrates](#) was almost impossible. When asked by a wealthy young man, "Is being good something that can be taught?" Socrates replied, "Far from whether it is teachable, I haven't the faintest idea of what being good is." Instead of answering, they investigate the problem together. Socrates questions, the young man answers, the discussion moving round and round until finally, they reach a conclusion. But with one final salvo from Socrates, the conclusion crumbles and they are back where they started. As the bewildered young man leaves, Socrates says, "Go tell what you have learned." According to Socrates' philosophy, it is in [examining](#) life that you learn something, not in reaching an answer.

The Importance of Socrates' Philosophy



Marble head of Socrates, Hellenic / Roman, 380-60 BC

Socrates and his method of examining life had such an impact on philosophy that philosophy is divided into what came before him and what came after. The philosophers that came before him are termed the pre-Socratics for precisely this reason, and although we don't call the philosophers that came after him post-Socratics, it has been said that "all philosophy is a footnote to Plato." And Plato was Socrates' most revered pupil and the primary disseminator of Socrates' philosophy.



Socrates teaching his disciples by Joseph Abel, ca. 1801

Socrates himself never wrote anything, and in Plato's writing, where he [uses](#) Socrates as the main character in his dialogues, it can be difficult to tell how much is the historical Socrates and how much is Plato. Nonetheless we can get an idea of what Socrates was like. In [Meno](#), one such Platonic dialogue alluded to above, Socrates and the title character sit down to discuss what it means to be good. The discussion is lively, and together they arrive at two competing conceptions of what good is, without ever reaching a definite conclusion. This is typical Socrates, always questioning, often ironic, and never settling for the easy answer.

The Death of Socrates and Athenian Politics

What we do know about the historical Socrates is that he was born in 469 B.C.E. and condemned to death at the age of seventy in 399. He was a citizen of [Athens](#) and practiced philosophy for his entire life, except for a brief excursion abroad with the Athenian military. At age seventy he was tried and found guilty

by his fellow Athenians for impiety to the state gods, introducing new gods, and corrupting the youth. Although the charges weren't completely spurious, they likely belied the real motivations for [Socrates' trial](#).



The Death of Socrates by Jacques Louis David, 1787

At the time of the trial, Athens had only just recovered its democracy. Some years earlier Athens had lost the brutal Peloponnesian War to the Spartans. The Spartans installed an authoritarian government that came to be known as the Thirty Tyrants, under whose rule there was considerable bloodletting. Unfortunately for Socrates, the leader of the tyrants, a man named Critias, and at least one other member, were formerly his students. Additionally, another former student, Alcibiades, had at some point defected to the Spartans. From a political perspective, Socrates was tainted by these undemocratic associations, and while he couldn't [be](#) prosecuted directly due to an amnesty, it seems likely his accusers used his trial to prosecute him for his political connections.

The Development of Reasoned Argument in Socrates' Philosophy

As democracy developed in Athens, so did the need for persuasive argument. This resulted in a veritable industry within education taught by people called [Sophists](#). They taught rhetoric, oratory, and logical argument for a price. The Sophists came in for much criticism. It was considered uncouth in Athenian

society to pay for education, and today the phrase “mere sophistry” is indeed still used pejoratively for arguments lacking in substance.

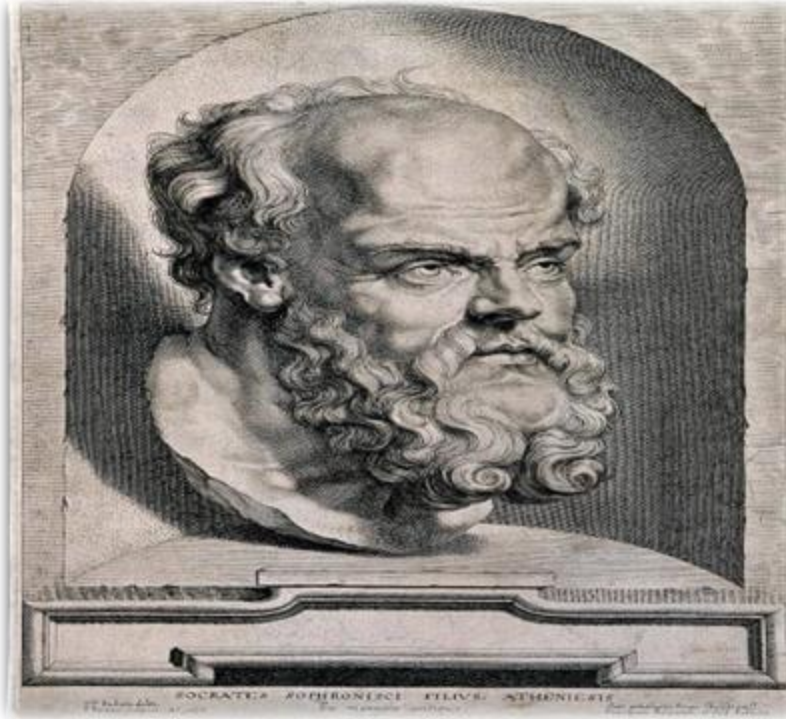


Plato's symposium by Pietro Testa, 1648

Socrates criticized what the Sophists did and often engaged them in debate. But Socrates himself was arguably a sophist too; he followed in that tradition, except that he didn't charge for what he taught and was more interested in uncovering genuine knowledge than simply teaching logical argumentation. Although he was undoubtedly a master of that art.

By all accounts, Socrates was a witty, ironic, eloquent speaker, one who had cutting insight and thought incredibly deeply. As the story goes, the Delphic Oracle, who the Greeks believed spoke directly for the gods, said that Socrates was the wisest man alive. This was something that Socrates' initially found hard to believe. He set out to test whether it was true by questioning all the people he thought were wise or knowledgeable and engaging them in discussion. He came away disappointed — each professed their own wisdom, yet none of them seemed to know what they were talking about. Socrates concluded that he wasn't the wisest man alive because he knew a lot, but because he [knew that he knew nothing](#).

The Socratic Method of Philosophy



Socrates. Line engraving by P. Pontius, 1638, after Sir P. P. Rubens

Although the story above is not quite true, Socrates' humility goes some way to [explain](#) why he was so successful and influential as a thinker. Starting from a place of ignorance allowed him to question his own assumptions and those of others. His claims of ignorance also helped to disarm his interlocutors. As was suggested above, Socrates proceeded in his investigations by asking questions of his conversation partner until he was able to find some logical inconsistency or paradox that disproved their answers. This [dialectic method](#) is at the centre of Socrates' philosophy and has since become known as the Socratic Method, which, although made famous by Socrates, is believed to have begun with [Zeno](#), a student of [Parmenides](#).

The dialectic method is also well-suited to the literary dialogues in which Socrates' conversations are presented. The earlier Platonic dialogues are thought to best reflect Socrates' philosophy and each dialogue typically finds Socrates [asking](#) questions and examining different kinds of virtue. In *Charmides*, Socrates discusses temperance and self-control, in *Crito*, justice, and in *Symposium*, love. The curious thing is that Socrates rarely reaches any firm

conclusions, although he and his companions are wiser than they were prior to the conversation.

The Defence of a Great Philosopher



The Acropolis of Athens by Leo von Klenze, 1846.

It is difficult to [piece](#) together the real Socrates. Most of what we know about him comes from Plato. The later Platonic dialogues are not an accurate depiction of Socrates' philosophy, since in them Socrates has become a mouthpiece for Plato's own ideas. Plato was at the trial of Socrates, and his first dialogue, the *Apology*, might be a fairly accurate account of Socrates' arguments. But Plato was also a literary genius; he didn't simply document what Socrates said but turned it into a highly readable, informative, and thought-provoking defence of the great philosopher.

Another source of information about Socrates was the historian [Xenophon](#). He had also been a student of Socrates at some point and was eager to defend his former teacher in his writings. Doubts persist as to whether he could have been at Socrates' trial as he was apparently in exile from Athens at the time and, moreover, he lacked the literary flair and philosophical wit of Plato. Nonetheless,

his memoirs provide another perspective on Socrates' philosophy and there are points of agreement between his writings and Plato's. However, it is believed that Plato's account of Socrates is more accurate, something that was confirmed and moderated by Aristotle.

Examining the Virtues



The Debate of Socrates And Aspasia by Nicolas André Monsiaux, 1801.

Socrates was a moral philosopher. He was not interested in mathematics or science but was concerned with the quality of his soul and that of others. Socrates' philosophy examines how we should live. This led him to discussions on various virtues, things like wisdom, justice, courage, piety, and so on. Socrates saw his mission as one of correcting false beliefs. He taught that people should care less about their bodies and possessions and more about their souls, saying, "wealth does not bring goodness, but goodness brings wealth." As such he believed he was serving the city of Athens and its citizens by highlighting their incorrect thinking.

Socrates was a man of principle. He lived according to what he believed. He was not interested in material possessions or physical beauty – he was well known to be poor and ugly — and he took no money for his teaching as the Sophists did. He dedicated his whole life to understanding the virtues so that he could be more virtuous and educate others on how to be virtuous too, which he thought led to true happiness. He was uncompromising in his beliefs about the right way to live, which is part of the reason why he ended up being condemned to death.

The Legacy of Socrates' Philosophy



The School of Athens by Raphael, 1509-11.

What is Socrates' legacy? He is often called the "first" philosopher, not in the sense that he came first, but in the sense that he is top of the pile. Yet in some ways, he was more of a sage than a philosopher. He can be compared with Buddha, who died ten years before Socrates was born. Both led a life of contemplation and investigation into how to live, and both gathered many followers who later spread their teachings. But whereas Buddha founded a purely spiritual practice, Socrates inspired a method of using reason to uncover

truths about life, or at the very least, highlight where our thinking is deficient, a method that is at the heart of western philosophy.

The legacy of Socrates was helped in no small part by dying a martyr's death and by having Plato as a student. Even though Socrates could have escaped the charges against him, he wouldn't have compromised his beliefs. It was this courage that gave an added integrity and weight to his teachings, beyond his wit and wisdom. Plato was inspired by what he saw and heard in Socrates' philosophy, and his writings immortalized Socrates to such an extent that he profoundly shaped western cultural and intellectual history.

But why did Socrates never reach any conclusions? The main point of Socrates' philosophy can be glimpsed in what he says to Meno at the close of their conversation: "And as for you, go and tell others what you yourself have been convinced of." It is this call to investigate what it means to live, think for yourself, and not expect any simple answers, that is Socrates' greatest legacy, and it is one that has inspired all philosophers since.

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Socrates versus Plato

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Socrates/Socrates-versus-Plato>

We can conclude that Plato was not blind to the civic and religious dangers created by Socrates. Part of what makes his *Apology* so complex and gripping is that it is not a one-sided encomium that conceals the features of the Socratic way of life that lay behind the anxiety and resentment felt by many of his fellow citizens. Plato, of course, leaves no doubt that he sides with Socrates and against *Athens*, but in doing so he allows us to see why Socrates had enemies as well as friends. The multisidedness of Plato's portrait adds to its *verisimilitude* and should increase our confidence in him as a source of our understanding of the historical Socrates. A defense of Socrates that portrayed him as an *innocuous* preacher of *moral* pieties would have left us wondering why he was sentenced to death, and indeed why anyone bothered to indict him in the first place.

Plato gives no hint in his *Apology* that he had any reservations about the way Socrates led his life or the doctrines that guided him; the format of the *Apology* prevents him from doing so. He has made the decision to let Socrates speak for himself in this work and to refrain from offering any of his own reflections on the *justice* or injustice of the charges against his teacher. But, in the *Republic*, he puts into the mouth of its principal

interlocutor, "Socrates," an observation about the corrosive power that [philosophy](#) can have when it takes hold at too early an age. When young people first hear philosophical questions about the traditional moral standards they have learned from their parents and their [community](#), and when they see that it is difficult to defend these orthodoxies without falling into contradiction, they are prone to reject all traditional [morality](#) and to become essentially lawless. For this [reason](#), philosophy may come to be seen as a dangerous and disreputable pursuit. The Socrates of the *Republic* therefore suggests that in an ideal society the young should not be exposed to [ethical](#) doubt until they are well into their maturity. This, of course, is not a restriction that the historical Socrates imposed on himself. In Plato's *Apology*, Socrates prides himself on addressing his questions to every Athenian—no one, in his view, is too young or too old for the examined life—and he freely acknowledges that the young [love](#) to see their elders embarrassed when they are unable to defend their beliefs. Whereas the Socrates of Plato's *Apology* assumes that there is no need to place limits on philosophical inquiry, the Socrates of the *Republic*—who speaks as the mouthpiece of Plato—holds that in an ideal society this kind of activity would be carefully regulated. Similarly, in Plato's *Laws*, the main speaker, an unnamed visitor from Athens, praises [Sparta](#) and [Crete](#) for forbidding the young to criticize the laws of their [communities](#). Plato's great admiration for Socrates was all the more remarkable because it coexisted not only with a recognition of why Socrates was considered dangerous but also with his [belief](#) that Socrates was, to some degree, guilty of impiety and of corrupting the young.



Happiness by Human Effort

<https://www.pursuit-of-happiness.org/history-of-happiness/socrates/>

Socrates lived in Athens Greece his entire life (469-399 BC), cajoling his fellow citizens to think hard about questions of truth and justice, convinced as he was that "the unexamined life is not worth living." While claiming that his wisdom consisted merely in "knowing that he knew nothing," Socrates did have certain beliefs, chief among them that [happiness is obtainable by human effort](#). Specifically, he recommended gaining rational control over your desires and harmonizing the different parts of your soul. Doing so would produce a divine-like state of inner tranquility that the external world could not effect. True to his word, he cheerfully faced his own death, discussing philosophy right up to the moments before he took the lethal hemlock. Through his influence on Plato

and [Aristotle](#), a new era of philosophy was inaugurated and the course of western civilization was decisively shaped.

Socrates – A Little Background

Socrates has a unique place in the [history of happiness](#), as he is the first known figure in the West to argue that happiness is actually obtainable through human effort. He was born in Athens, Greece in 460 BC; like most ancient peoples, the Greeks had a rather pessimistic view of human existence. Happiness was deemed a rare occurrence and reserved only for those whom the gods favored. The idea that one could obtain happiness for oneself was considered *hubris*, a kind of overreaching pride, and was to be met with harsh punishment.

Against this bleak backdrop the [optimistic](#) Socrates enters the picture. The key to happiness, he argues, is to turn attention away from the body and towards the soul. By harmonizing our desires we can learn to pacify the mind and achieve a divine-like state of tranquility. A moral life is to be preferred to an immoral one, primarily because it leads to a happier life. We see right here at the beginning of western philosophy that happiness is at the forefront, linked to other concepts such as [virtue](#), justice, and the ultimate meaning of human existence.

A Case Study of a Happy Person

The Roman philosopher Cicero once said that Socrates “wrested philosophy from the heavens and brought it down to earth.” Prior to Socrates, Greek philosophy consisted primarily of metaphysical questions: why does the world stay up? Is the world composed of one substance or many substances? But living amidst the horrors of the Peloponnesian War, Socrates was more interested in ethical and social issues: what is the best way to live? Why be moral when immoral people seem to benefit more? Is happiness satisfying one’s desires or is it [virtuous activity](#)?

Famously, Socrates was more adept at asking such questions than spoon-feeding us the answers. His “Socratic method” consisted of a process of questioning designed to expose ignorance and clear the way for knowledge. Socrates himself admits that he is ignorant, and yet he became the wisest of all men through this self-knowledge. Like an empty cup Socrates is open to receive the waters of knowledge wherever he may find them; yet through his cross examinations he finds only people who claim to be wise but really know nothing. Most of our cups are too filled with pride, conceit, and beliefs we cling to in order to give us a sense of identity and security. Socrates represents the challenge to all our preconceived opinions, most of which are based on hearsay and faulty logic. Needless to say, many people resented Socrates when he pointed this out to them in the *agon* or public square.

The price Socrates paid for his honest search for truth was death: he was convicted of “corrupting the youth” and sentenced to die by way of Hemlock poisoning. But here we see the life of Socrates testifies to the truth of his teachings. Instead of bemoaning his fate or blaming the gods, Socrates faces his death with equanimity, even [cheerfully discussing philosophy with his friends](#) in the moments before he takes the lethal cup. As

someone who trusted in the eternal value of the soul, he was unafraid to meet death, for he believed it was the ultimate release of the soul from the limitations of the body. In contrast to the prevailing Greek belief that death is being condemned to Hades, a place of punishment or wandering aimless ghost-like existence, Socrates looks forward to a place where he can continue his questionings and gain more knowledge. As long as there is a mind that earnestly seeks to explore and understand the world, there will be opportunities to expand one's consciousness and achieve an increasingly happier mental state.

Socrates Three Dialogues on Happiness: The Euthydemus, The Symposium, and The Republic

Although Socrates didn't write anything himself, his student Plato wrote a voluminous number of dialogues with him as the central character. Scholarly debate still rages as to the relationship between Socrates' original teachings and Plato's own evolving ideas. In what follows, we will treat the views expressed by Socrates the character as Socrates' own views, though it should be noted that the closer we get to a "final answer" or comprehensive *theory* of happiness, the closer we are to Plato than to the historical Socrates.

The Euthydemus

This is the first piece of philosophy in the West to discuss the concept of happiness, but it is not merely of historical interest. Rather, Socrates presents an *argument* as to what happiness is that is as powerful today as when he first discussed it over 2400 years ago. Basically, Socrates is concerned to establish two main points: 1) happiness is what all people desire: since it is always the end (goal) of our activities, it is an *unconditional* good, 2) happiness does not depend on external things, but rather on how those things are *used*. A wise person will use money in the right way in order to make his life better; an ignorant person will be wasteful and use money poorly, ending up even worse than before. Hence we cannot say that money by itself will make one happy. Money is a conditional good, only good when it is in the hands of a wise person. This same argument can be redeployed for *any* external good: any possessions, any qualities, even good looks or abilities. A handsome person, for example, can become vain and manipulative and hence misuse his physical gifts. Similarly, an intelligent person can be an even worse criminal than an unintelligent one.

Socrates then presents the following stunning conclusion:

"So what follows from what we've said? Isn't it this, that of the other things none is either good or bad, and that of these two, wisdom is good and ignorance bad?"

He agreed.

"Well then let's have a look at what's left," I said. "Since all of us desire to be happy, and since we evidently become so on account of our use—that is our good use—of other things, and since knowledge is what provides this goodness of use and also good fortune, every man must, as seems plausible, prepare himself by every means for this: to be as wise as possible. Right?"

"Yes," he said. (281e2-282a7)

Here Socrates makes it clear that the key to happiness is not to be found in the goods that one accumulates, or even the projects that form the ingredients of one's life, but rather in the *agency* of the person himself who gives her life a direction and focus. Also clear from this is a repudiation of the idea that happiness consists *merely* in the satisfaction of our desires. For in order to determine which desires are worth satisfying, we have to apply our critical and reflective intelligence (this is what Socrates calls "wisdom"). We have to arrive at an understanding of human nature and discover what brings out the best in the human being—which desires are mutually reinforcing, and which prevent us from achieving a sense of overall purpose and well-functioning. No doubt we can also conclude from this that Socrates was the first "positive psychologist," insofar as he called for a scientific understanding of the human mind in order to find out what truly leads to human happiness.

The Symposium

This dialogue takes place at a dinner party, and the topic of happiness is raised when each of the partygoers takes a turn to deliver a speech in honor of Eros, the god of love and desire. The doctor Eryximachus claims that this god above all others is capable of bringing us happiness, and the playwright Aristophanes agrees, claiming that Eros is "that helper of mankind...who eliminates those evils whose cure brings the greatest happiness to the human race." (186b) For Eryximachus, Eros is that force which gives life to all things, including human desire, and thus is the source of all goodness. For Aristophanes, Eros is the force which seeks to reunite the human being after its split into male and female opposites.

For Socrates, however, Eros has a darker side, since as the representation of desire, he is constantly longing and never completely satisfied. As such he cannot be a full god, since divinity is supposed to be eternal and self-sufficient. Nevertheless, Eros is vitally important in the human quest for happiness, since he is the intermediary between the human and the divine. Eros is that power of desire which begins by [seeking physical pleasures](#), but can be retrained to pursue the higher things of the mind. The human being can be educated to move away from the love of beautiful things which perish to the pure love of Beauty itself. When this happens, the soul finds complete satisfaction. Socrates describes this as a kind of rapture or epiphany, when the scales falls from one's eyes and one beholds the truth of one's existence. As he says:

If...man's life is ever worth the living, it is when he has attained this vision of the soul of beauty. And once you have seen it, you will never be seduced again by the charm of gold, of dress, of comely boys, you will care nothing for the beauties that used to take your breath away...and when one discerns this beauty one will perceive the true virtue, not virtue's semblance. And when a man has brought forth and reared this perfect virtue, he shall be called the friend of god, and if ever it is capable of man to enjoy immortality, it shall then be given to him. (212d)

While Socrates and Plato seemed to believe that this mystic rapture was primarily to be achieved by philosophy, there will be others who take up this theme but give it either

a [religious](#) or aesthetic interpretation: Christian thinkers will pronounce that the greatest happiness is the pure vision of God ([Thomas Aquinas](#)), while others will proclaim that it is a vision of beauty in music or art (Schopenhauer). In any case, the idea is that this one overwhelming experience of truth, beauty or the divine, will make all the sufferings and tribulations of our lives meaningful and worth experiencing. It is the Holy Grail that comes only after all our adventures in the wild.

The Republic

In Plato's masterpiece *The Republic*, Socrates wants to prove that the just person is happier than the unjust person. Since, as he already argued in the *Euthydemus*, all men naturally desire happiness, then we should all seek to live a just life. In the process of making this argument, Socrates makes many other points regarding a) [what happiness is](#), b) the relationship between pleasure and happiness, and c) the relationship between pleasure, happiness, and virtue (morality).

The first argument Socrates presents concerns the analogy between health in the body and justice in the soul. We all certainly prefer to be healthy than unhealthy, but health is nothing but the harmony among different parts of the body, each carrying out its proper function. Justice, it turns out, is a similar kind of harmony, but among the different parts of the soul. Injustice on the other hand is defined as a "sort of civil war" between the parts of the soul (444a): a rebellion in which one rogue element—the desirous part of our natures—usurps reason as the controlling power. In contrast, the just soul is one that possesses "psychic harmony:" no matter what life throws at the just man, he never loses his inner composure, and can [maintain peace and tranquility despite the harshest of life's circumstances](#). Here Socrates effectively redefines the conventional concept of happiness: it is defined in terms of internal benefits and characteristics rather than external ones.

The second argument concerns an analysis of pleasure. Socrates wants to show that living a virtuous life brings greater pleasure than living an unvirtuous life. The point is already connected with the previous one, insofar as one could argue that the psychic harmony that results from a just life brings with it greater peace and inner tranquility, which is more pleasant than the unjust life which tends to bring inner discord, guilt, stress, anxiety, and other characteristics of an unhealthy mind. But Socrates wants to show that there are further considerations to emphasize the higher pleasures of the just life: not merely peace of mind, but the excitement of pursuing knowledge, produces an almost godlike state in the human being. The philosopher is at the pinnacle of this pursuit: having cast off the blinders of ignorance, he can now explore the higher realm of truth, and this experience makes every merely physical pleasure pale in comparison.

Perhaps the most powerful argument, and the one Socrates actually 'dedicates to Zeus' (583b-588a) can be called the "relativity of pleasure" argument. Most pleasures are not really pleasures at all, but merely result from the absence of pain. For example, if I am very sick and suddenly get better, I might call my new state pleasurable, but only because it is a relief from my sickness. Soon enough this pleasure will become neutral as I adjust to my new condition. Nearly all of our pleasures are relative like this, hence they are not

purely pleasurable. Another example would be the experience of getting high on drugs: this can produce a high state of pleasure in the short-term, but then will inevitably lead to the opposite state of pain. Socrates' claim is however that there are some pleasures that are not relative, because they concern higher parts of the soul that are not bound to the relativity produced by physical things. These are the philosophical pleasures—the pure pleasure of coming to a greater understanding of reality.

A few hundred years after Socrates, the philosopher [Epicurus](#) would take up Socrates' argument and make a very interesting distinction between “positive” and “negative” pleasures. Positive pleasure depends on pain because it is nothing but the removal of pain: you are thirsty so you drink a glass of water to get some relief. Negative pleasure, however, is that state of harmony where you no longer feel any pain and hence no longer need a positive pleasure to get rid of the pain. Positive pleasure is always quantifiable and falls on a scale: do you have more or less pleasure from sex rather than from eating, for example. Positive pleasures are bound to be frustrating as a result, since there will always be a contrast between the state you are in now and a “higher” state which would make your present experience appear less desirable. Negative pleasures, however, are not quantifiable: you cannot ask “how much are you not feeling hungry?” [Epicurus](#) concludes from this that the true state of happiness is the state of negative pleasure, which is basically the state of not experiencing any unfulfilled desires. Needless to say, one can also make connections between this perspective and the [Buddhist](#) concept of achieving nirvana through the removal of desire, or the modern writer [Eckhart Tolle's](#) injunction to experience the simple *stillness* of being without the interference of [positive thoughts](#) and emotions.

Conclusion

Socrates (as seen through the lens of Plato) can be said to espouse the following ideas about happiness:

- All human beings naturally desire happiness
- Happiness is obtainable and teachable through human effort
- Happiness is *directive* rather than *additive*: it depends not on external goods, but how we *use* these external goods (whether wisely or unwisely)
- Happiness depends on the “education of desire” whereby the soul learns how to harmonize its desires, redirecting its gaze away from physical pleasures to the love of knowledge and virtue
- Virtue and Happiness are inextricably linked, such that it would be impossible to have one without the other.
- The pleasures that result from pursuing virtue and knowledge are of a higher quality than the pleasures resulting from satisfying mere animal desires. Pleasure is *not* the goal of existence, however, but rather an integral aspect of the exercise of virtue in a fully human life.



Kindly visit the Web Link to see the Videos

- 01] Socrates - The Man Who Knew Too Much Documentary [1:12:23]
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tZ-DlOzPO6A>
- 02] Greek Philosophy 7.1: Socrates' Life and Methods [1:00:16]
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=eg4mOclgtT4&t=0s>
- 03] Introduction to Socrates | Ancient Philosophy [16:33]
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aKDqAvkwGkI>
- 04] 9 Life Lessons from Socrates (Socratic Scepticism) [24:38]
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y4y2e4rUxfo>
- 05] After Socrates: Episode 1 - Introduction | Dr. John Vervaeke
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bIJuIN6kUcU> [1:25:40]
- 06] Socrates vs Plato vs Aristotle [16:12]
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z3Zwo35lab0>
- 07] J. P Barron Memorial Lecture "Socrates, Eros and Magic"
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Dk8AIq_2y4

Monuments for Socrates

01] Athens Square

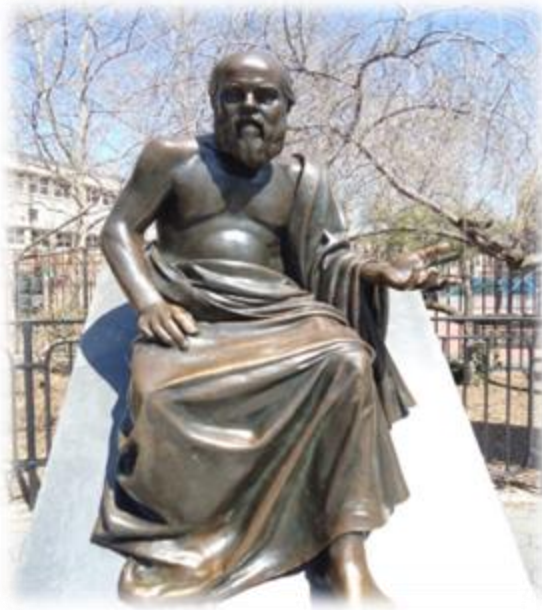
<https://www.nycgovparks.org/parks/athens-square/monuments/1462>

Socrates History

This bronze piece depicts ancient Greek philosopher Socrates (469-399 B.C.) in a seated position, gesturing as if engaged in dialogue. Designed by artist Anthony Frudakis (born 1953) and dedicated in 1993, the statue was commissioned by Athens Square, Inc., a community-based group formed to promote Athens Square Park's renovation. The sculpture is one of a quartet of sculptures planned for the park, including Athena, Aristotle, and Sophocles, that are intended to evoke an ancient Greek theme to honor Astoria's Greek-American population.

Athens Square Park was designed by architect Stamatios P. Lykos, who was commissioned by Athens Square, Inc. to create a sunken court amphitheater for public performances and events. By basing his design for Athens Square

on an ancient Greek city planning scheme, Lykos creates “a little bit of Athens in Astoria.” Lykos uses the Socrates sculpture and three Doric columns installed in 1996 as the focal point of the plaza, noting in his plans for the park that the two features form a backdrop for activities held at the site.



Socrates Details

- **Location:** Facing sunken plaza
- **Sculptor:** Anthony Frudakis
- **Architect:** Stamatios P. Lykos, AIA, ASLA
- **Description:** Seated figure (heroic scale) on base in form of right trianguloid
- **Materials:** Figure--bronze; Base--black Carolina granite
- **Dimensions:** Figure H: 6'; Base H: 7'6" W: 4' D: 7'6"
- **Cast:** ca. 1993
- **Dedicated:** May 15, 1993
- **Foundry:** Modern Art Foundry
- **Fabricator:** Consolidated Stone Setters (pedestal)
- **Donor:** Athens Square, Inc.

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02] A Tribute to Socrates

<https://www.greeknewsagenda.gr/a-tribute-to-socrates/>

03] Monument of Socrates and Confucius

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